

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND POLICY: IS REFORM STILL NECESSARY?**

by

Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Williams  
United States Army

Dr. Craig Nation  
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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## **ABSTRACT**

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American students are graduating without the basic skills required for today's member of the society; loss educational opportunities require a redirect of a tremendous amount of government resources to other social programs which assist students that performed poorly in school or dropped-out. This paper will address the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act on the American education system and seek to explain why education reform is needed for America to remain competitive in today's world.



## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND POLICY: IS REFORM STILL NECESSARY?

We live in a competitive world. And so policies must be put in place to recognize the competition of the global economy and prepare our people to be able to continue to compete so America can continue to lead.

—President George W. Bush

...school reform is not just an “education issue.” It’s also an economic issue, a civic issue, a social issue and a national security issue. And it’s everybody’s issue.

—Margaret Spellings, U.S. Secretary of Education

Education has stimulated America’s tremendous economic success and its quality of life. Education is also one of the key elements that influence national economic potential. Other developed and developing countries, such as China and India, have significantly improved their education systems in an attempt to close the economic and quality of life gaps with America. In view of this challenge, many state and federal government officials are deeply concerned with America’s current education standing within the international community, particularly in math and science areas. Education is vital for America to retain its economic power within today’s global marketplace. In fact, poor quality education contributes to America’s substance abuse rate, incarceration levels, and poverty percentage. To eliminate some of the issues that are plaguing America, the Bush administration aggressively fought for the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. This paper will address the impact of the NCLB Act on the American education system and seek to explain why education reform is needed for America to remain competitive in today’s world.

### Key Historical Periods of Education in the United States

President Thomas Jefferson was the first American leader to suggest establishing a public education system that would be controlled by the government, free from religious biases, and available to all people irrespective of their status in society. <sup>1</sup> Initially, education in America was primarily for the wealthy. However, education reformers Horace Mann and Henry Barnard aggressively argued their belief that common schooling could create good citizens, unite society and prevent crime and poverty. As a result of their efforts, free elementary level public education was available for all American children by the end of the nineteenth century. <sup>2</sup> Also during this period, Charles Eliot, the president of Harvard University, led the Committee of Ten, a group of educators, to establish a standard school curriculum. The Committee recommended eight years of elementary education and four years of secondary education with two main tracks, a classical

or contemporary track. However, both tracks included courses that are now considered basic, such as foreign languages, mathematics, science, english and history. This contributed towards high schools to offer alternatives to the Latin and Greek classic curriculum and established the belief that the same subjects could help both students who would go on to attend college and those who would become productive members of society in other ways.<sup>3</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, America's twenty eight largest cities reduced their school boards by fifty percent. Most local district based positions were eliminated, in favor of city-wide elections. Thus local members of the communities (local businessmen and blue collar wage earners) lost control of their local schools to professionals (like doctors and lawyers), big businessmen and other members of the richest classes.<sup>4</sup> In 1917, the federal government passed the Smith-Hughes Act which provided federal funds for vocational education, thus shifting job skill training from trade union apprenticeship programs to the public education system which big manufacturing corporations could now influence through the school boards consolidation movement.<sup>5</sup> In 1922, the Ku Klux Klan, the Scottish Rite Masons and the Oregon school system moved to "Americanize" their schools by requiring all children between the ages of 8 and 16 to attend public schools. The state supreme court ruled by an unanimous vote that Oregon could not force all school students to attend public schools. This law upheld parents' right to choose the kind of education, including with a public or private school, that they want for their children.<sup>6</sup>

While education increased in importance as the industrial age matured, it was not until 1944 with the passage of the Serviceman Readjustment Act that 7.8 million servicemen were able to take advantage of the legislation to grasp expanded educational opportunities. It is estimated that 238,000 veterans became teachers. The G.I. Bill of Rights gave working class men college scholarships for the first time in U.S. history and contributing to eliminating the belief that a college education was only for the wealthy with more than two-million veterans now attending colleges and universities.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka ruling, the United States Supreme Court unanimously agrees that segregated schools were "inherently unequal" and must be abolished.<sup>8</sup>

In 1957, President Eisenhower mobilizes federal troops to enforce integration in Little Rock, Arkansas public schools. Eisenhower was forced to react because he could not allow a state governor to use the state's National Guard to defy the U.S. federal government.<sup>9</sup>

Also in 1954, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, a potential threat to America's national security as well as a blow to national pride, contributing to the passage of the National Defense

Education Act (NDEA) that authorized more funding for scientific research and science education. The rationale behind NDEA was simply that supporting science, no matter how abstract, would benefit the United States in ways that were impossible to see.<sup>10</sup>

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) 1965 recognized that children from low-income homes required more educational support than children from affluent homes. ESEA allocated resources to assist disadvantaged children from low-income homes. This funding helped to establish programs such as Title 1, Head Start and bilingual education. According to author Joel Spring, this act impacted future legislative actions. First, ESEA switched funding from general federal aid to education towards category aid, and linked federal aid to national policy concerns like poverty and national defense. Second, the Act provided federal aid to educational programs directly benefiting poor children regardless of what institution, public or private, the student was enrolled in. Third, it created additional state bureaucracy to support the goals and spirit of ESEA, thus increasing state involvement in education.<sup>11</sup>

In 1971, in the case of the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) vrs. Pennsylvania, the federal court ruled that students with mental retardation were entitled to a free public education. One year later, Mills vrs. the Board of Education of Washington, D.C. extended the PARC vrs. Pennsylvania ruling to include other students with disabilities and required the provision of adequate alternative educational services suited to the child's needs including in special education.<sup>12</sup>

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibited discrimination based on gender in all aspects of education. Many people think of this law in conjunction with girl's and women's participation in sports but its application is in fact much broader,<sup>13</sup>

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released the report A Nation at Risk. The report concluded: "We have been, in effect, committing an act of unthinking unilateral disarmament." This report created a movement to improve education throughout America with many states passing laws that increased instructional time and graduation requirements.<sup>14</sup> State governors adopted national education goals to guide local and state school improvement efforts. The goal was for all students to master core disciplines and for American students to become "first in the world" in math and science. However, it was not mandatory for states to participate in implementing these standards.<sup>15</sup>

The history of American education has shown that the system tries to level the playing field for all children to receive a quality education. However, America's public education system has come under significant criticism from business, political and social leaders. Problems such as America's educational standing within the international community, specifically in the

subjects of math and science, and America's high drop-out and graduation rates, have raised the question whether the system is providing the kind of quality education required for all students to be successful in the twenty first century. In 2001, President George W. Bush set forth an initiative to change this. By securing Congressional passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, Bush was able to force reform in schools. The Act holds schools accountable for student achievement levels and provides penalties for schools that do not make satisfactory yearly progress toward meeting the fixed educational goals.<sup>16</sup>

#### The No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was established to have every child achieve proficiency by 2013/2014, and to ensure that all students graduate from high school and all teachers are highly qualified. The major components of NCLB are the accountability of schools to raise academic achievement for all children; improve teaching and learning; make sure that all teachers are highly qualified; expand parents' choices when their children are placed in failing schools; and provide information to all parents on how well their children's schools are doing. School districts must make annual progress in reaching these goals or face possible state imposed sanctions.<sup>17</sup>

As part of the accountability provisions, NCLB has set the goal of having every child achieve proficiency according to state-defined educational standards by the end of the 2013-2014 school-year. To reach that goal, every state has developed benchmarks to measure progress and make sure every child is learning. Schools districts are required to separate, or disaggregate student achievement data, holding schools accountable for subgroups, so that no child falls through the cracks. Data are analyzed separately for children of different racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, students from economically disadvantaged homes, and children who are learning English as a second language. This analysis enables schools to identify groups of students who need additional assistance to meet the state's academic expectations.<sup>18</sup>

Under NCLB, schools that do not meet the state's definition of "adequate yearly progress" for two straight years (school wide or in any major subgroup) are identified as "in need of improvement," and they are given assistance to improve. Assessments called for in NCLB help schools identify subject areas and teaching methods that need improvement. For example, if reading scores do not reach the state's benchmark, the school knows it needs to improve its reading program. In the past, these schools might not have received the attention and the help



they needed to improve. Through NCLB, every state has made a commitment that it will no longer ignore when schools are not meeting the needs of every student in their care.<sup>19</sup>

Title I of ESEA, Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, awards grants to states and local school districts and schools with the highest concentrations of economically disadvantaged students to help them improve the education of disadvantaged students, turn around low-performing schools, improve teacher quality, and increase choices for parents. When a Title I school is found to be "in need of improvement," school officials are required to work with parents, school staff, the district and outside experts to develop a plan to turn around the school. The school's improvement plan must incorporate strategies, relying on scientifically based research to strengthen the teaching of core academic subjects, especially in the subject areas that resulted in the schools being deemed in need of improvement. Schools in need of improvement are also expected to develop strategies to promote effective parental involvement in the school and to incorporate a teacher-mentoring program.<sup>20</sup>

Annual assessments to measure children progress provide teachers with independent information about each child's strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, teachers can develop lessons to make sure each student meets or exceeds the standards. In addition, principals can use the data to assess where the school should invest resources, such as in professional development.<sup>21</sup>

NCLB outlines the minimum qualifications needed by teachers who work on any part of classroom instruction. It requires that states develop plans to ensure that all teachers of core academic subjects are highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school-year. States must include in their plans annual, measurable objectives that each local school district and school must meet in moving toward the goal. They must also report on their progress in annual report cards distributed to parents and the community. Under NCLB, each state must measure every public school student's progress in reading and math in each of grades 3 through 8 and at least once during grades 10 through 12. By school year 2007-2008, assessments in science will be added. These assessments must be aligned with state academic content and achievement standards. They will provide parents with objective data about their child's academic strengths and weaknesses.<sup>22</sup>

NCLB requires states and school districts to give parents easy-to-read, detailed report cards on schools and districts, telling them which ones are succeeding and why, and the progress they are making. Included in the report cards are student achievement data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, English language proficiency, migrant status, disability status and low-income status, as well as important information about the professional

qualifications of teachers. With these provisions, NCLB ensures that parents have important, timely information about the schools their children attend and whether they are performing well or not for all children, regardless of their background. In the first year that a Title I school is considered to be in need of improvement, parents receive the option to transfer their child to another higher performing public school, including charter schools, in the same school district. Transportation must also be provided to the new school, subject to certain cost limitations. In the second year that a school is considered to be in need of improvement, the school must continue offering public school choice. Additionally, the school must offer as an option supplemental educational services, such as free tutoring, to low-income students who remain at the school.<sup>23</sup>

A recent article published by *NEA Today* provides a broad overview of some of the most obvious problems with the legislation.<sup>24</sup> These problems include:

- The law demands that all children learn at the same rate, in the same way, largely without regard to individual differences and needs.
- The law discourages experienced teachers from staying in the classroom while promoting alternative teaching programs that don't require adequate training about how students learn.
- The law labels schools as 'failing' if just a few students do not do well on a high-stakes, standardized test.
- NCLB sets the wrong priorities, requiring states and school districts to spend more for paperwork and bureaucracy--even as states are cutting resources for things we know work: smaller class sizes, qualified teachers and education support professionals, and up-to-date books and materials.

What this information clearly demonstrates is that, at the present time, the NCLB has a number of significant problems that must be addressed if the federal government it is to improve or reform the American public education system.

#### Why America Needs Education Reform

Education is the major force for America becoming the world's largest and strongest economy. The statistics show that the US workforce is the most educated in the world with 85percent of adult Americans having at least a high school diploma and 28 percent having a college degree.<sup>25</sup> The National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education, a nonprofit group based in San Jose, California warns that the American workforce education level, including both high school and college, could begin to decline in the coming years. This downward trend in the

workforce education level could be contributed to the rapidly emerging demographic changes within America. This is a significant concern because if true the next generation of American may be less well-educated than the current generation. Also, America's standard of living could decrease simply because less educated Americans on the average earn fewer dollars than educated American. The National Center President Patrick Callan estimates that by 2020 the US minority workforce population will double to 37 percent.<sup>26</sup> The issue is minorities, Hispanics and African American, since they are far less likely to earn degrees than their white counterparts. On a recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam, 39 percent of white eighth graders were proficient in reading, vrs. 15 percent of Hispanics and 12 percent of blacks. If this fact remains constant 31 million young Americans could not even receive a high school diploma. Therefore, as educated baby boomers retire, they will most likely be replaced by minorities including, Hispanics and African Americans.<sup>27</sup> These trends are not carved in stone, says Jack Jennings, President of the Center on Education Policy, a Washington think tank. Nonetheless, the achievement gap is extremely significant.

Closing this achievement gap is important for our economy, our social stability, and the nation's moral health.<sup>28</sup> The achievement gap must be looked at in broad terms, and in doing so it becomes clear that the issues go beyond the classroom. Teachers must do all they can to close the gap during school classes but society must understand that family involvement, the teacher/school environment, and the community all play a major role in educating a child. The performance of urban schools is first to come to mind. A majority of urban schools have a large minority enrollment population. These schools are less likely to motivate learning on a massive scale because they have more inexperienced and uncertified teachers; more outdated textbooks; less automation technology; larger class sizes; buildings requiring significant repairs', and a community plagued by excessive violence.<sup>29</sup> For example, high-minority, low-performing schools hire fewer top-quality teachers than others and have greater turnover - not because they want to, but because they can't attract and retain better candidates. It is technically accurate, but largely pointless, to blame the substandard practice of under-qualified teachers for the poor outcomes of their students; these teachers shouldn't be teaching in the first place.<sup>30</sup>

Urban schools must have the required funds to reform. Without the needed funds, minority students have fewer and fewer educational opportunities; and most importantly, schools have fewer competent staff members.<sup>31</sup> These schools do not have much to offer teachers coming into the workforce so it is very difficult to hire and keep qualified teachers. This all leads to students who are less apt to perform well in school or stay in school until graduation.<sup>32</sup> Without a good education, many students are being prepared for the streets, the

drug life, violence, unemployment, and prison. American minority students are more likely to be unable to compete with the best and brightest students from all parts of the world for jobs in America.<sup>33</sup> The nation's capital, Washington D.C., in a state by state comparison, came in last on the NAEP reading exam in 2003. Seven percent of its Black fourth graders scored at or above proficient on the reading exam, versus 70 percent of White fourth graders.<sup>34</sup> In Texas, the Hispanic population has exploded and since minorities are less likely to graduate Texas' ranking in the percentage of adults who have a high school degree has dropped from 39<sup>th</sup> in 1990 to dead last among the 50 states.<sup>35</sup> The achievement gap also exists in middle-class minority communities, where students with professional parents and a well resourced school system show a similar gap. An example is Prince George County, Maryland, which is almost 70 percent Black, and is one of the most affluent Black communities in America; however academically, it is one of the lowest performing counties in Maryland.<sup>36</sup>

These are not the only problems that keep minority students from performing well in school. The way children are raised has a marked affect on how much they achieve academically. Many children are less prepared to enter school because their parents do not have the knowledge or the ambition to teach them fundamentals or positive work habits in their formative years.<sup>37</sup> Many of these children are offspring of people who have not placed much value on education or are under educated themselves. This population may be ever increasing with the percentage of dropouts increasing from 25 percent in the early 1980's to 32 percent in 2002.<sup>38</sup> Michael Cohen, president of Achieve Inc., a nonprofit school standards group created by governors and business leaders, said that nationally, the on-time high school graduation rate is lower now than it was in 1983, when the report A Nation at Risk first sounded the alarm about the nation's failing schools.<sup>39</sup> But other reasons for low parental participation may exist: conflicting work schedules, transportation problems, or lack of knowledge of how to be effectively involved in their children education. Parents need to be informed of how their children are doing and should insist that teachers find ways for them to become involved. Work still must be done to create a better learning environment for our children and to build confidence in our schools system. Among the problems to be addressed are the following:

- Improve student motivation and other factors that contribute to learning. Among the most serious problems in schools, according to a 2000 survey of teachers, were students coming to school unprepared to learn (cited by 30 percent of teachers); lack of parent involvement (24 percent of teachers); student apathy (21 percent); and student disrespect for teacher (17 percent). Student motivation is a key factor in academic achievement; if students are not motivated to learn, other reforms will make

little difference. Yet motivation decreases steadily as students move from the early elementary grades into high school.<sup>40</sup>

- Address socio-economic factors that affect learning. Census data show that the percentage of children under 18 living in poverty has gone up in recent years, from 16.2 percent in 2000 to 17.6 percent in 2003. This issue has educational relevance, because higher levels of poverty are associated with lower levels of achievement.<sup>41</sup>
- Continue steps to reduce school violence, bullying, and substance abuse. News of periodic school shootings serves as a reminder that the nation must continue its efforts to make schools reliably safe learning environments, free of any violent crimes or deaths. According to the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, the problem of students being bullied at school has increased, rising from 5 percent of middle and high school students in 1999 to 7 percent in 2003. Measures of marijuana use, alcohol use, and drug distribution at school showed no consistent patterns of increase or decrease between 1993 and 2003.<sup>42</sup>
- Fix deteriorating or overcrowded school facilities. Half the nation's schools—and a higher percentage in urban cities—reported in 1999 that their buildings were in less than adequate condition due to problems with roofs, foundations, windows, plumbing, heating, or other features. About one-fourth of the nation's schools are overcrowded.<sup>43</sup>
- Reduce funding inequities among school districts. Vast funding disparities persist among school districts. The most affluent school districts in the nation (those at the 95th percentile of revenues per student) received more than two and a half times as much funding per pupil than the poorest school districts (those at the 5th percentile)—an average of \$16,286 per pupil for the most affluent districts versus \$6,208 for the poorest.<sup>44</sup>

American national business and political leaders are also worried about our schools' ability to motivate students' interest in math and science. These areas of weakness within our schools are believed to have led to the growing influence of Asian countries in the fields of engineering and technology.<sup>45</sup> A trend has for several years found American high school students performing at levels lower than those of their peers in other developed countries.<sup>46</sup> Bill Gates, Chairman of the Microsoft Corp., said, "When I compare our high schools to what I see when I'm traveling, I am terrified for our work force of tomorrow."<sup>47</sup> Rep. Vernon Ehlers, R-Michigan, declares it to be a steadily worsening crisis.<sup>48</sup> The Business Roundtable, a Washington based coalition of leading American corporations, says that America cannot wait for another challenge such as the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite before the country

starts working on it. According to this group, the number of students in the US planning to major in engineering has declined by one third between 1992 and 2002. Last year, America produced 60,000 engineers, while some reports say China currently produces a million. The Business Roundtable report also estimated that one half the doctoral students graduating from engineering schools in the US are foreign nationals.<sup>49</sup> Business leaders have cause to be concerned about where the nation's scientific talent will come from as the population becomes more diverse. According to a 2003 American Council on Education report, minority students represent about 11 percent of the total higher education enrollment. However, Black students earned only 80 doctoral degrees in the physical sciences and 82 doctorates in engineering. Hispanic college enrollment has improved but the graduation rate is still the lowest of all minority groups.<sup>50</sup> "The jobs of the future are going to require the basic understanding of principles of math and science. If we aren't able to educate our children, they won't get decent jobs, and I am not just talking about scientists and engineers," Mr. Ehlers said. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs requiring science, engineering or technical training will increase by more than 24 percent by 2014 to 6.3 million.

#### Who has the Responsibility of America's Education System

In the 20th century, states assumed a more active regulatory role and consolidated school districts into larger units with common procedures. In 1940 there were over 117,000 school districts in the United States, but by 2000 the number had decreased to fewer than 15,000.<sup>51</sup> The following are just a few of the statistics based on the 2002-2003 school year: 95,615 public schools remain the primary educational delivery system in the US; there are 48.2 million public school students in the US; the average student-to-teacher ratio is 16:1. The US spends \$501.3 billion annually at all levels of government on elementary and secondary education, investing more per pupil than almost any other nation.<sup>52</sup> States became much more responsible for financing education and supporting efforts to balance local school district expenditures by using state funds and laws to provide equal access to education for all children regardless of the wealth of individual districts. In 1940 local property taxes financed 68 percent of school expenses, while the states contributed 30 percent and the federal government contributed 2 percent. In 1999 state governments contributed 49 percent of elementary and secondary school revenues, local districts contributed 44 percent, and the federal government provided 7 percent.<sup>53</sup> The questions that require asking are, who is in charge and how can anyone effectively manage an enterprise consisting of 50 states and more than 14,000 separate school districts, each being managed without a common set of standards. However, I believe local

officials should have a significant say in the process as reflected in the distribution of revenue to influence action within the local community. For example, a decision by a local school board to close an unnecessary public school to produce a more efficient school district might be accepted by the local community if the decision was made locally rather than by a person at state or national level who has no ties to the local community. Leadership, in the form of national direction, is probably the most important element of a successful strategy. President Bush recognized that a lack of national leadership and direction was a major factor in this country's declining global educational standing. Leadership remains a problem in our educational system today because there is no one person at any level accepting full responsibility for the operation of the system.

#### Pros of No Child Left Behind

Thanks to the NCLB Act, now four years old, political leaders, parents, and educators are seeing more and more data about school performance. Schools are required to access and to give themselves an annual report card, with assessment results broken down by poverty level, race, ethnicity, disability, and English-language proficiency.

#### Cons of No Child Left Behind

The pressures brought on by the NCLB have prompted many schools to stretch the truth with statistics on test scores, violence, and dropout rates. These stretched truths do not provide a clear picture of the school's performance; they deceive taxpayers about education budgets, and keep kids locked in failing institutions.<sup>54</sup> NCLB has created incentives for states to game the system by lowering standards; authors Cindy Brown and Elena Rocha argued that only national curriculum standards and national definitions and measures of student performance at proficiency levels can prevent this behavior.<sup>55</sup> For example, parents assume that proficiency means grade-level performance. However, proficiency standards are different from state to state where students with the same skills will have different proficiency scores. Texas sets its cut score—the correct number of responses or percentile ranking a student needs to be considered proficient in third-grade reading—at the 13th percentile, while Nevada sets its cut score at the 58th percentile.<sup>56</sup>

Under NCLB, when schools do not make adequate yearly progress on state tests for three successive years, students can use federal funds to transfer to higher performing public or private schools, or receive supplemental education services from providers of their choice. States may take over schools failing four to five consecutive years with options such as replacing the failing schools staff or bid out for private management.<sup>57</sup> The incentives for

teachers to influence the standardized tests results will increase as schools begin to feel the consequences of low scores. Teachers provided testing materials to students nearly a dozen times in 2003 in Nevada and Indiana have seen a raft of problems, including three Gary schools stripped of their accreditation in 2002 after hundreds of 10th graders received answers for the Indiana Statewide Testing for Education Progress-Plus in advance. A teacher in Fort Wayne took a different approach in 2004, when school officials had to throw out her third-grade class's scores after she gave away answers by emphasizing certain words on oral test questions. In January 2005 another Fort Wayne third-grade teacher was suspended for tapping children on the shoulder to indicate a wrong answer.<sup>58</sup>

In 2004, 81 percent of Pennsylvania's schools met NCLB yearly progress benchmarks using new test standards. However, it was later found that Pennsylvania's schools used the same rules in 2004 that were used in 2003, thus the number of schools falling short of the yearly benchmark was 566 instead of 1,164; and instead of 81 percent meeting the benchmark only 61 percent would have succeeded.<sup>59</sup>

The NCLB Act requires all states to designate hazardous schools as persistently dangerous and allow their students to transfer to safer institutions.<sup>60</sup> An example is Locke High School in Los Angeles, CA. During the 2003-04 school year its students suffered three sex offenses, 17 robberies, 25 batteries, and 11 assaults with a deadly weapon which was an improvement over some past years: In 2000-01 the school had 13 sex offenses, 43 robberies, 57 batteries, and 19 assaults with a deadly weapon. However, the state didn't think Locke High qualified. In the 2003-04 school year only 26 of the nation's 91,000 public schools were labeled persistently dangerous with forty-seven states and the District of Columbia reporting that they were home to not a single unsafe school. Yet D.C. Office of the Inspector General reports that during that school year there were more than 1,700 "serious security incidents" in city schools, including 464 weapons offenses.<sup>61</sup>

If you want to make a school's performance look impressive, you don't have to cheat on standardized tests—another option is to modify the dropout rate. According to the state audit of Houston's dropout data, from 16 middle and high schools, more than half of the 5,500 students who left (or were reported to have moved) in the 2002 school year should have been declared dropouts but were not.<sup>62</sup> Incentives tend to influence administrators to count students who leave as anything other than dropouts because a graduation rate is an important measure of a school's performance: If parents and policy makers believe a school is producing a high number of graduates, they may not think reform is necessary.<sup>63</sup>



It is educational leaders, rather than political or business leaders, who must find solutions for leaving no child behind. Educators can not simply sit by and let others dictate their solutions for improving schools. Educational leaders must inform the public that a system of standardized tests, adequate yearly progress targets, vouchers, and punishments will not work.<sup>64</sup>

#### Recommendation

I would suggest modifying the NCLB Act in the following manner. NCLB should never allow a school to be labeled persistently dangerous, thus permitting certain individuals to transfer. Rather, it should assist in providing resources to correct the problems so the entire school population will have equal access to a quality education. The first recommended modification is to identify a chain of command for the US education system. My recommendation for the chain of command is (in order of power) the President, the governor, and the mayor or county commissioner. Schools have assumed many nonacademic responsibilities, including ensuring that students don't bring weapons to schools, instilling ethical behavior through character education, stopping the spread of AIDS, and battling drunk driving and tobacco use. The rationale for this chain of command is that these elective officials have the cross-agency authority to coordinate programs for children that support and maintain a quality learning environment.<sup>65</sup> These are individuals elected and trusted by the people to provide social and economic well being to all. Teachers will once again want to come to work in schools that were once crime ridden and/or below health standards when the mayor or county commissioner's job is to ensure all schools are equal in their physical structure and educational resources. The governor's job is to provide additional funds required by mayors or county commissioners. If the governor is unable to provide additional funds from the state resources, he validates the request for additional funds for his state from the federal government.

The second modification is the creation and implementation of a national educational standard that all states will work from which will include a national standardized test. State school systems have the flexibility to select a curriculum that will facilitate learning. However Federal funding would be contingent on schools showing students making minimal required gains from year to year as established by the federal standards and demonstrated through national standardized testing. In addition, the state school system would be required to provide data indicating success that can be attained through the curriculum they have selected to implement in their schools. The school systems should also submit reflective goals for their schools to work toward attaining each year beyond the minimal standards set by the Federal government. Because of the magnitude of school districts, the federal government will need the

state governors to monitor the overall effectiveness of the school districts in their states. Those schools not meeting minimal standards as specified by the national guidelines will be required to submit a correctional plan to the local government, i.e. the mayors or county commissioners and their school superintendents, with specific goals and timelines, not to exceed a year. If again the national guidelines have yet to be met, the school and local government must collaborate to submit a correctional plan to the state or governor with specific goals and timelines. Failure for a third year will require the school and local government to abide by correctional plans as dictated by the governor.

The final modification to the NCLB Act is developing and sustaining quality teachers. In order to change the educational system, the US needs to breathe new life into a dead body. The remedy lies in how our teachers think about teaching. Our future must be full of citizens and workers who are able to think creatively, problem solve, and pool their resources by working collaboratively with diverse populations. Teachers need to facilitate this type of individual. Our current rigged methods of teaching do not result in flexible thought processes – the kind of thinking that will be required in the future. However, in order for current teachers to move beyond what they have been taught, they must be willing to take a risk. The federal government must step out and fund research and school initiatives that will take risk in changing the status quo. I fully support the idea of Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford and Gary Sykes of Michigan State University that a supply policy for education similar to the US medical manpower program which supports the training and placement of doctors could also work for teachers. Darling-Hammond and Sykes also state, that the nation has a surplus of qualified teachers but not in the classrooms of poor, minority, and low achieving students and quick fix alternative certification programs that send people from other fields into difficult schools with little or no training in how to teach students cannot solve the problem.<sup>66</sup>

These simple recommendations are expensive but America must get serious about investing in its future, specifically since President Bush called for a 3.8 percent drop in the education department's discretionary spending, or \$2.1 billion less than the agency received for fiscal 2006. If approved by Congress, his plan would mean the largest percentage cut for the department since fiscal 1996.<sup>67</sup> In the words of Thaddeus Stephens, "Ignorance is more costly than taxes."

### Conclusion

America spends a tremendous amount of money on public education but problems in our schools persist. We struggle with the different quality levels of teaching across the entire

spectrum of the nation's schools; particularly between schools in affluent areas and schools of the inner city or urban areas. Many problems were identified within the US public education system. There are many types of policies in place to improve the system. The NCLB Act has helped but it is flawed. Lost educational opportunities for children create an employment gap, an earning gap, an incarceration gap, and other quality of life gaps.<sup>68</sup> If America is to retain its position as the world leader, a change in our education system is required because American finds themselves in competition for their jobs not just from its neighbors but from other countries as well. What will it take to reform America's education system? The answer is leadership. President Bush has taken a step with the No Child Left Behind Act. Now communities must act to fix the flaws of this act so that America can remain competitive in the world. The key to fixing the problem is ensuring that parents are active in their children's education process, children are motivated to do well in school, and funding, school resources, and teacher quality is equal throughout the education system.

### Endnotes

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